

# League for Socialist Action/ Ligue Socialiste Ouvrière

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#### WOMEN'S LIBERATION RESOLUTION

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## INTRODUCTION

The following draft resolution on women 's liberation was adopted by the Political Committee, on October 22, 1972, replacing the draft resolution originally published in July.

The present text differs from the original text at four points, which have been indicated in the document. The beginning of each addition is marked by the letter ``B`` in the margin; the end of each addition is marked by the letter ``E.`` The four additions are on page 5, pages 9-10, pages 15-18, and page 25. Aside from these additions, the text is identical to that of the original draft.

*(Editor`s note: the additions made by the new LSA leadership are italicized)*

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## **WOMEN'S LIBERATION RESOLUTION**

The line of this resolution has been adopted by the Central Committee for submission to the 1972 convention.

Never before has there been a feminist movement as radical in its critique of society, as irreconcilable in its opposition to oppression, and as potentially powerful a force for helping to end that oppression, as the emerging feminist movement of today. This new feminist movement, which stands on the shoulders of the struggles for equality of the pioneer Canadian feminists, has already reached into all layers of society.

The scope of this radicalization of Canadian women can be seen not only in the many different forms of the organized feminist movement — from consciousness raising groups to single issue action coalitions — but much more broadly in the great interest in and sympathy with feminist ideas. Feminism is a best seller with hundreds of feminist books being published in the last few years. The women's magazines have changed to reflect this radicalization with feminist columns, interviews and articles. The establishment of women's studies courses on many Canadian campuses is yet another reflection. Some of the most conservative organizations, traditionally status quo and pro-establishment, such as the churches, the YWCA, the Canadian Medical Association and the Canadian Psychiatric Association, etc., have been compelled to respond to this radicalization of women from many different backgrounds.

The Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada, designed by Ottawa to siphon off or deaden the growing demands of women for an end to their second-class status, only resulted in giving further impetus to this radicalization. It established as incontrovertible fact the situation that many women were beginning to suspect — that 53% of the population is discriminated against at all levels and in all fields, and is systematically excluded from the mainstream of society.

The struggle of women is taking many forms, from individual protest and questioning, to actions in the streets appealing to the populace at large against central aspects of women's oppression. All these diverse struggles are aspects of the growing feminist movement.

The feminist movement today begins by questioning all the basic assumptions of this society. Feminists are rejecting the myth that permeates capitalism and has been a cornerstone of all class society — the myth of the “natural inferiority of women.” More and more women are rejecting what is said to be their “biological destiny”, the traditional role of women in the nuclear family. And these women are looking at society as a source of their oppression rather than to their own “inherent nature”. This bold denial of biological inferiority is part of the unprecedented militancy of feminism today.

### **Roots of the New Feminism**

The new feminist movement is emerging out of the sharpening contradictions of capitalism. It is becoming glaringly obvious to increasing numbers of women that the means exist to free them; that the material means are widely available to free women from all the most onerous aspects of housework; and that medical science is now capable of developing means to allow women to have control over their bodies to a degree never before possible in human history. It is common knowledge that a shorter period of a woman's lifespan is now devoted to her traditional role as childbearer and child-rearer; that women are spending more time in educational institutions than ever before; and that more women are in the work force — the percentage rising from 1/4 to over 1/3 in the last 15 years — and thus have independent incomes.

But these developments, far from freeing women, have only served to pose more sharply the big contradiction between the possibilities for their liberation and the reality of their oppression. Women are still imprisoned by their traditional role in class society, that of wife and childbearer, chained to domestic slavery. They are denied access to safe effective birth control and abortion and to child care facilities. The married woman who works is forced to work two shifts, one for the boss and one for her family. All working women are forced to accept lower wages, rationalized by the supposed primacy of their “natural role” in the family and thus the secondary character of their job. Even a superior education doesn't qualify women for most jobs held by less educated men.

While women today can see the increased possibilities of freeing themselves, they are denied the opportunity to do so. They are told from birth to death that before all else they must be a wife and mother.

The new feminism is also a product of and an integral part of a broader radicalization taking place in Canada and throughout the world. Women have gained inspiration and the confidence to struggle from the other struggles of the oppressed for their rights. Three movements in particular have inspired Canadian women – the student movement with its many faceted struggle against the war in Vietnam, for student democracy, etc.; the struggle of the Québécois for self determination; and the black struggle in the United States.

Student women, with their experience in other anti-capitalist struggles, particularly the movement in defense of the heroic struggle of the Vietnamese for self-determination, founded the first feminist groups in Canada a few years ago. Today students in the universities and now, reaching down into the high schools, are among the most active builders of the mass action campaigns of the feminist movement.

From the beginning, the feminist movement in English Canada and Quebec has been internationalist in its outlook, looking for inspiration and expressing its solidarity with struggles of other oppressed peoples. The consciousness that oppressed **minorities** are rising up all over the world has played a big role in spurring this oppressed **majority** to struggle against its oppression. The rise of the black nationalist movement in the U.S. with its assertion of black pride and black power, its search for black history, and its consciousness that all blacks are oppressed, played an especially important role in sparking the explosion of feminist consciousness, pride and sisterhood upon which the feminist movement is based.

In Quebec, the nationalist consciousness of les Québécoises, oppressed as part of a nation as well as a sex, has added militancy to their developing feminist consciousness. Les Québécoises are even more oppressed by all the reactionary institutions and attitudes of capitalist-engendered male supremacy, more subject to clerical reaction, lack of access to abortion, deprived of even more legal rights than their sisters in English Canada.

The involvement of women in the nationalist struggle in Quebec has propelled them into action against their own oppression. And les Québécoises, in questioning the family and other basic institutions of capitalism, have added an explosive new element with its own dynamic to the radicalization of the nation. Quebec feminists have raised the slogan: Pas de Québec libre sans libération des femmes! — Pas de femmes libres sans libération du Québec! (No free Quebec without liberation of women! No liberated women without the liberation of Quebec!)

Feminism has touched all aspects of Quebec society. In response to this powerful movement, as yet scarcely structured, the Quebec government was forced last year to pass a number of laws granting women a few of the rights conceded to men over a century ago. The demonstrations of women around the FLQ (*Front de Libération du Québec*) trials forced the reform of the Quebec courts to permit women to sit on juries; the protests of women also brought bills enabling Quebec women to drink in certain pubs and enabling married women to own property, sign contracts, etc.

Feminism was a big factor in this Spring's Quebec labor upsurge. The upsurge was marked by the tendency for each sector of the nation to raise their own demands as part of the struggle and women were certainly no exception to this tendency.

The original demand of the public sector for a \$100 a week minimum wage was above all a demand of the women workers — 60% of the public workers are women, and these women, triply oppressed as women, Québécois and workers, earn with few exceptions considerably less than the \$100 minimum.

There are numerous examples of the women strikers' militancy. Women teachers and nurses played a particularly prominent role in the struggle. Women were in the leadership of the occupation of Albert Prévost hospital and in pressuring the doctors to support the workers' control of the hospital. Inspired by the example of the Big Three labor leaders in opting for jail rather than bail, 17 female labor leaders along with 17 male leaders convicted of contempt of court charges for directing their members to defy the government strikebreaking injunction, marched back to prison to forfeit their bail and serve their sentences. Their defiant act served as a symbol to the nation.

The most sustained and organized expression of the development of feminist consciousness in Quebec as in English Canada has been the movement for repeal of the abortion laws. This movement attacks directly the traditional view of la

Québécoise solely as wife and mother. It demands that women be the ones who control their own lives, not their husbands, father, priests and politicians. It is through this struggle against the federal government's anti-abortion laws that women from both Quebec and English Canada have united, through separate organizational forms, in common struggle against the Canadian state.

## **The Family**

Feminism challenges the myth that women have always been subservient to men and that they are biologically destined for this status. Capitalist mythology teaches that the nuclear family always existed and that women who question their role in it are unnatural, sinful, sexually frustrated, suffering from "penis envy" and other psychological disorders. Bourgeois historians, sociologists, and anthropologists have hidden the real facts of women's role in history. Doctors and scientists have hidden the truth of women's biology.

Feminists today are involved in a search for their real history and for the tools to create their futures. This process has highlighted the significance of the long-neglected and suppressed work of Frederick Engels, Karl Marx and Marxists of today.

Marxists have exposed the real facts of women's history — that contrary to bourgeois mythology, women have not always been oppressed. For the greater part of human history, before the development of private property, social classes and the family, women were the economic and social leaders in a society based on communal property relations and egalitarianism. It was only with the development of the relatively recent institutions of class society that women were dethroned and patriarchy established.

In the early communal societies the basic economic unit was not the family, but rather the maternal clan, organized and led by women. The clan was responsible for providing for the needs of all its members on an equal basis. Women's downfall came with the transfer of the central social and economic functions from the clan to the individual patriarchal families. This historic turning point came with the development of economic surplus and the individual accumulation of this surplus as private property. In the family women became isolated from community activity and monogamy for the wife was strictly enforced to assure legitimate heirs. The existence of the family as a basic institution of society, far from being an eternal organization is only of recent origin, brought about through a profound social revolution that overthrew the egalitarian matriarchal society which had existed or hundreds of thousands of years previously.

These facts not only expose the fallacy of the myth of 'the "natural inferiority" of women, they also point toward the road to women's liberation: if it took a social revolution which culminated in the overthrow of communal property relations to dethrone women from their leading position in society, it will take a revolution, no less profound, to overthrow private property relations and to lay the basis for the liberation of women.

Today, the patriarchal nuclear family unit, the latest form of the family which has existed in one form or another throughout the whole of class society, remains as the basic social institution of class society and the basic institution through which women are oppressed. Far from being a harmonious relationship based on free association and love, the family is in reality a prison. All its members are in effect bound to it not by choice but by economic and social compulsion.

Capitalism doesn't socially provide any of life's necessities. Instead it shoves this overwhelming responsibility onto the nuclear family. Each individual family unit is dependent on its own resources to provide for the welfare of its members — to provide food, clothing, shelter, health care, child care, education, care of the sick and old. And each family is thrown into competition with all the others to get an adequate share of the available jobs, goods and services. Thus the family is one of the basic instruments through which the social and economic inequities between different classes are perpetuated.

Women are the backbone of the family. Within the family they are defined by their reproductive functions; their central role is that of childbearer and child-rearer. Women provide the unpaid labor that is essential to the carrying out of the

tasks class society has assigned to the family.

The role of women in the family means that the birth of a child commits a woman to years of work and drudgery, and exclusion from other areas of human activity. This is as true today as it was in the past when the family consumed all of the woman's time and strength in productive activity. Their role in the family serves as the chief rationalization for the oppression of women in all other spheres: the role of wife and mother — defined as primary and life-long — is used to justify unequal job and educational opportunity, lower pay, the exploitation of women as sex objects, discrimination against women in all fields including arts, sports, scientific research, etc., and the use of women as a part of the reserve army of labor (the unemployed —ed.)

**B** *Lack of control over her body is a fundamental factor that drives a woman into marriage and motherhood and ties her for life to the family.* **E.** Because women lack control over the decision to have children, they lack control over their lives. The vulnerability and dependency which flow from this are important features of every woman's existence. It helps to reinforce the concept that women are basically powerless, subject to forces beyond their control. It helps keep women dependent on their husbands, boyfriends, and fathers, not simply for economic security but even for their social status and psychological identity.

In addition to shifting the burden for social welfare onto individuals, the family also plays a crucial role in inculcating the norms and values of the private property system. It teaches competitiveness — security as a unit through competition with other family units, a sense of private property, and a narrow outlook on life. Within the patriarchal family with its sexual repression and hierarchical setup, children receive training in submissiveness to authority, a training necessary to an economic system which demands acceptance of the right of the rich to rule.

Women, along with radicalizing youth, are questioning the family. The demands of the feminist movement for 24 hour child care facilities provided by the state, free access to birth control and abortion, and equal pay and job opportunities hit directly at the family which relies on economic and social force. Opponents of the women's liberation movement accuse feminists who attack the family as an institution of wanting to destroy warm relationships between people. But in fact it is the family system and class society which are the real destroyers of genuine human relationships. Women are putting forward demands to make it possible for profoundly human relationships to develop between men and women, children and parents. Their demands attack the fundamental character of capitalist society which puts its insatiable drive for profit before the satisfaction of human needs and poses the necessity of a new, non-class ridden society — a socialist society.

## **A Revolutionary Strategy for Women's Liberation**

The oppression of women is one of the basic building blocks of class society and the myth of the "natural inferiority" of women is a cornerstone of bourgeois ideology. The growing reflection by women of this deep-seated oppression is a profoundly revolutionary development. When women question their oppression, they must question the very basis of this society which rests on the oppression of all women and the overwhelming majority of men for the benefit of a tiny minority of capitalists who own the wealth and rule over the majority.

But some forces (*tendencies of thought*) in the women's liberation movement feel that it is impossible to unite women against this deep-seated oppression. They claim that women are divided in so many ways that it is impossible to unite them in one common movement. Women, they point out, belong to different classes in society; and as such have nothing vital in common with one another that makes it possible for them to unite in struggle. Therefore, they conclude, to unite them is impossible. What is needed is to orient to one sector of women, to working class women, or poor women, or women of oppressed nationalities.

Others hold the opposite point of view — that women have everything in common and that any differences among women of class or race, etc. are of no importance. Some of these women believe that women constitute an oppressed class or caste and that the source of women's oppression lies not in class society, but in men as a sex. They see the struggle as being against innate male chauvinism rather than against capitalist society with its patriarchal institutions

which sustain and breed male chauvinism.

Both these views are wrong because they deny the fundamental nature of the oppression of women. To be sure women are divided by class society into different classes, nations, etc. But at the same time there is a powerful basis for the unity of all women and that is – universal female oppression. Women of all social classes suffer — to very different degrees — from lack of child care facilities, lack of access to safe birth control and abortion, unequal pay, job discrimination, warped education, and social conditioning. These are all aspects of a very real oppression of women and all women have a stake in struggling around these issues. Working class women and women of oppressed minorities, who suffer most from this oppression, have the biggest interests in struggling around these issues and when they really commence to move, will constitute the biggest battalions and develop the most thoroughgoing fighters. But all women to varying degrees can be won to the struggle.

The feminist struggle is different and independent from all other movements because it is based on a unique oppression and unfolds accordingly with its own unique dynamic. Since women as a sex are oppressed by capitalism, a strategy can be developed that can unite women of widely different backgrounds and experience in common struggle against the source of their oppression. No other movement or anti-capitalist struggle can substitute for the independent organization of women which is essential to winning full liberation for women.

But at the same time, the struggle of women is part of the broader anti-capitalist struggle. Women have a basic interest in supporting and allying with others who are struggling against capitalism. As long as social relations are organized on the basis of private property and production for profit, the material foundations which gave rise to the family and the subjugation of women will continue, along with war, racism, economic exploitation, and alienation. The struggles of all oppressed sectors of society — women, workers, students, oppressed nationalities — to meet their needs, drive toward one common goal — the destruction of capitalism.

Revolutionaries, in projecting a strategy must understand how the ruling class rules and how power will be wrested from its hands. In Canada, we face one of the most highly organized, most conscious ruling classes in history, closely allied with the most powerful ruling class on earth – the U.S. capitalist class. No small or elite force will be capable of taking power from their hands. The struggle against Canada's present rulers must mobilize the majority of the population, under the leadership of the working class and its vanguard, to take the resources out of the hands of the tiny class which controls them, for their own private profit and place them under the control of the vast majority.

The feminist movement represents the emergence of new forces which have the potential of organizing hundreds of thousands of women in anti-capitalist struggle and neutralizing and depriving capitalism of any basis of support among millions more. As such, it represents an important component in the coming Canadian revolution. A revolutionary strategy for women must be aimed at bringing into struggle to fight for their own interests against those of the ruling class, the millions of women who have not yet moved against their oppression.

The building of a mass movement requires the understanding that the capitalist class rules in this country through fears and illusions as well as by violence. A key illusion among the oppressed masses that helps to perpetuate class rule is that this system is capable of reforming itself to satisfy the needs of the vast majority. It is only through the experience of struggle that it becomes clear to the masses that they must take over and control society for themselves if their demands are to be fully met. And it is through struggle that the oppressed and exploited masses begin to gain confidence in the potential power they have to do this.

The struggle of women at the turn of the century was an aspect and an extension of the bourgeois- democratic revolution which granted democratic rights but in an incomplete and uneven form. Today many of those rights still do not exist for women or exist only on paper so that today's feminists' struggle is also for the most basic rights. But capitalism today, far from expanding and opening up a period of widening concessions, is attempting to turn back the clock. It is prepared to extend democratic rights and grant significant reforms only if forced to by a tremendous struggle of the oppressed. Such struggles have profoundly revolutionary implications.

A revolutionary strategy for the feminist movement must be based on a program of both transitional and democratic demands that can mobilize the masses of women in struggle against concrete manifestations of their oppression and for their most urgently felt needs. The purpose of this program, which is part of the broader transitional program of the

socialist revolution, is not to establish a series of demands which themselves individually or as a totality liberate women or “smash capitalism,” but rather it is to **mobilize** masses of women in struggle against the ruling class and its government. This program is not imposed upon the mass movement by the revolutionaries, it comes out of the struggle itself. The task confronting revolutionary socialists is to recognize the problems that concern women, the stage of the struggle and the actual situation and formulate demands to propose to women trying to act against their oppression.

The revolutionaries of the League for Socialist Action/ Ligue Socialiste Ouvrière first singled out some of the key problems facing women today in the presentation of the LSA/LSO brief to the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in 1968. Four main problems were singled out and demands raised for them:

- 1) **Woman must be freed from her traditional responsibilities for the child.** A far reaching system of government-financed facilities including nursery schools and child care centers controlled by those who use them must be established. A state wage for those women who choose to be homemakers.
- 2) **Woman must have complete control of her body.** Birth control devices and information freely available to all. The removal of all restrictions on abortion.
- 3) **Special measures to ensure that women benefit fully from the educational system.** Abolition of tuition fees and an income for students; universal co-education; special encouragement in analytical fields to compensate for the social prejudices which now exclude women; write women back into history.
4. **All barriers excluding women from equality in the area of work must be removed.** Equal pay for women; end sex discrimination in job classification; require employers by law to grant generous maternity leave with full pay.

These four areas have become areas of struggle over the past four years. Many of these demands have been developed further in struggle and other demands have arisen. In the first two areas listed, the main demands have become most clearly defined – free 24-hour child care as a central measure for freeing women from their traditional responsibilities for the child; and repeal of the anti-abortion laws to enable women to gain control of their bodies.

**B.** *The struggle for repeal of the abortion laws has come to the fore in the last few years, and has become the first cross-country campaign of the new feminist movement. It has provided a vehicle for women to unite in ongoing struggle against a fundamental aspect of their oppression as women, in struggle for a basic democratic right. The experience of women, uniting in non-exclusionist action coalitions around this demand, is important to all the present and future struggles of the feminist movement, giving women a good example of how to fight for their demands. Through the example of this struggle women are learning many important lessons about how to struggle to win their liberation. The abortion campaign poses concretely a struggle perspective for the feminist movement. It represents the action of women independent of and in opposition to the institutions of the bourgeoisie, around a clear demand that hits at an important aspect of their oppression.*

*The experience of the coalitions of organizations and individual women for repeal of the abortion laws has shown the importance of mass action coalitions around single issues to the building of a mass feminist movement. While just one of the many organizational forms which make up the feminist movement, they are the key organizational form for drawing broad numbers of women into struggle. A coalition unites women around a single issue. If they disagree on other feminist issues they can still become involved in the feminist struggle. It allows women to develop their feminist consciousness and a rounded analysis of their oppression through united struggle with other women for their common needs, against the interests of their oppressors. The coalitions help to cut across the misrepresentation of feminism by the media. Women who would not think of themselves as “women’s libbers” à la mass media are becoming, through their participation in the coalition, militant fighters for women’s liberation.*



*A coalition around a single issue provides a vehicle for women who want to participate in the struggle at many different levels. Through these coalitions, women who were previously inhibited from acting, or had no channel through which to act against their oppression, are becoming organizers, leaders, fighters, and clear political thinkers – in short everything that women are not supposed to be, that women have been educated from birth to believe themselves incapable of being.*

## **The Abortion Issue**

*It is no accident that abortion on demand has become the issue around which women today are organizing their first big international campaign. There are many factors which have made the struggle for the right to abortion the key struggle of the feminist movement at this time –*

**E.** – the fact that woman's lack of control of her own reproductive processes is so fundamental to her oppression in all areas; the fact that scientifically this control is now within reach, blocked only by reactionary laws, which are clearly posed as the source of the problem; and the fact that the ruling class and its supporters have chosen to make abortion the issue around which to push back the entire feminist struggle.

The abortion issue is mobilizing women because it strikes so profoundly at the basic definition of women in this society, as reproductive machines. For thousands of years, the whole of class society, women have lived within the narrow circumscribed role of wife and mother. They have been denied the right to control their own reproductive functions. They have been kept ignorant of the most basic facts about their own bodies, ignorant of their own sexual and social needs, and denied access to birth control and abortion.

This bitterly oppressive society punishes women for any attempt to freely express their own sexuality. It drives young women into the oppressive family institution by holding over them the constant threat of pregnancy with the ostracization and shame that goes with it. Susceptibility to unplanned pregnancies is used to justify the discrimination that women face in all areas of life, on the job, in the educational system, etc. This society has developed a concept to uphold this narrow definition of women as simply childbearers and child-rearers; it has developed the concept of the 'natural role of women' that for women "biology is destiny". The fact that although abortion today is a simple, safe operation, yet access to it is denied women by law, has propelled women into action for this basic democratic right. Women can see in this issue that it is the government, with its laws, that is standing in the way of their needs. They feel that if only they can mobilize enough support they can win this right from the government. They know if they do, it will be no mere symbolic gain for women but rather an important step forward in their struggle for liberation.

The opponents of women's liberation have made this struggle a central confrontation. They also recognize how key this issue is to the oppression of women and they are organizing on an international scale to make sure that women do not win abortion on demand and that what gains towards it that women have won are turned back. Around this issue, an important ideological confrontation is taking place between the feminists and the upholders of the oppression of women. The opposition has mobilized on its side all the most reactionary and powerful institutions of this society – the State, with its government, courts, police, schools, the media, etc. and the Catholic Church. Feminists have the task of mobilizing the millions of women from all classes who need repeal of the anti-abortion laws. This struggle will remain the central confrontation between the oppressors of women and the supporters of the feminist struggle for the next period.

Since the appearance of the first signs of the new rise of feminism, the capitalist rulers have unleashed vicious attacks on the feminist movement. They have used their most sophisticated propaganda methods to try to convince women that their interests lie, not with the feminist struggle, but in remaining docile and feminine, happy in their "natural role". They have tried to slander the feminist movement as being a small bunch of bra-burners expressing only their own sexual frustration. But as the feminist movement has grown and found an immediate response to many of its demands among thousands of women, the bourgeoisie has had to develop other lines of attack on this profoundly revolutionary movement. No longer able to dismiss this growing movement, they are attempting to direct its attack away from the capitalist system. They have launched a massive propaganda campaign designed to turn feminists' attention away from the struggle to change society into a harmless search for individual personal liberation. They have, particularly through the women's magazines and other facets of the media, put forward the picture of the "liberated woman", making a new

lifestyle for herself within the system. Their attempt to foster reformist illusion has led them to hail all the most conservative wings of the movement and attempt to portray them as the real movement. At the same time they have continued to slander and attack the mass action-oriented wing of the movement, singling out the struggle for repeal of the anti-abortion laws to organize a full scale attack on feminism. They are attempting to split the feminist movement around this issue, paying lip service to some of the less sharply posed issues of the movement. They are attempting to set back the entire struggle of women by defeating them on the abortion confrontation.

The ruling class understands very well that abortion law repeal is the issue capable of mobilizing masses of Canadian women in action independent of, and in opposition to them. Thus they aim to isolate and defeat the repeal movement. They put pressure on women to abandon their main struggle in favor of safer channels and issues. They have made the abortion issue the dividing line in the feminist movement between the supporters of a mass action strategy and those who oppose this strategy. This pressure has been reflected in the feminist movement by ultralefts and sectarians as well as reformists and liberals. Some of the more prominent initiators of the feminist movement like Marlene Dixon have retreated from the feminist struggle under this pressure.

### **The abortion Caravan — a turning point for the feminist movement**

The right to safe legal abortion first surfaced as a central organizing issue for feminists with the 1970 spring abortion caravan initiated by the Vancouver Women's Caucus. Prior to the caravan the feminist movement had only organized small actions and meetings and the gap between the widespread interest of women in feminism and the tiny feminist groups was painfully wide. The Caravan, which reached out to women across the country, posed concretely the challenge of mass action to bridge this gap between the actually organized feminist movement and its potential.

Feminists began organizing against the abortion laws because they knew from their own experience that denial of abortion was a big problem for women in Canada. Most of the groups, composed largely of university students, had been involved in abortion referral – the service of helping women find competent illegal abortionists or referring them to clinics in the United States where they could get legal abortions. The problem, they quickly saw, was the law, the “reformed” abortion law which enabled a few rich women to obtain legal abortions but denied this right to the vast majority of women. This frustrating work of helping only a handful of the hundreds of thousands of women who needed access to abortion turned feminists' attention towards a campaign to get rid of the abortion law.

The Caravan was a bold action, traveling through towns and cities that had only heard of “women's lib” in the newspapers. It culminated in a series of dramatic actions in Ottawa including a demonstration and rally of 500 women outside the Parliament buildings demanding free abortion on demand and repeal of the laws.

The press gave the Caravan big coverage, drawing the attention of millions of Canadians to it.

The abortion campaign was launched. But the Caravan, which posed the direction forward for the feminist movement, also revealed the problems. Its organizers were primarily women from the New Left who didn't understand the need for a mass action strategy for women's liberation. They were afraid that new women entering the movement would dilute the radical content of the movement and therefore tried to exclude those whom they didn't consider Marxists.

The ultraleft sectarians in the Caravan didn't understand that the struggle itself — directed at ending a fundamental aspect of women's oppression, clearly against the government — had a revolutionary thrust, and (*the sectarians*) were always looking for safeguards to ensure that it wouldn't be “co-opted.” A victory, according to their twisted logic, instead of laying the basis for further gains, would constitute a defeat! As the Caravan began across the country it carried on one side of the hearse which led the Caravan a banner reading “Repeal the abortion laws” and on the other side “smash capitalism.” These ultralefts argued that it was dishonest to just talk about repeal without declaring on every occasion that the women's liberation movement is a revolutionary movement. Hence the most revolutionary slogan they could think of, one they were sure wouldn't be co-opted – “smash capitalism.”

Immediately after the abortion Caravan, the ultralefts and reformists in the Vancouver Women's Caucus dropped the

abortion campaign. They argued that the government would soon grant repeal of the laws and that at any rate liberals would carry the fight. Revolutionaries, they said, had more important things to do. One group of “revolutionaries” who had participated in the Caravan split from the Caucus claiming that a revolutionary women’s party was necessary and that they were going to build one. They proceeded to build a “revolutionary collective” and soon faded from view.

Another group, led by Jean Rands, a founder of the caucus and its paper *The Pedestal*, put forward the position that the task was not to organize women around issues but rather to organize “around the totality of women’s oppression.” They proposed organizing only working class women since these women are, they said, “the women with power.” Other women in the VWC, including members of the League for Socialist Action and the Young Socialists, argued that the task was to build a mass feminist movement to unite in struggle all women, and that the abortion campaign concretely posed the possibility at doing that. Unable to answer their arguments politically, the Rands clique expelled the LSA and YS women, charging them with being members of a “male-dominated organization.” This expulsion brought about a deep split in the feminist movement in Vancouver that spread across the country. For several months following the Caravan the movement floundered, its only activity being an ongoing debate about its future centering on the abortion campaign. The New Left leaders of many of the groups opposed continuing the campaign against the government and red-baited those who opposed them. At the same time the movement floundered because of a crisis of leadership, the general sympathy with feminism continued to grow.

In November 1970 a cross-country conference was called for Saskatoon, Saskatchewan to settle this question. The opponents of a mass action strategy mustered all their arguments to explain why the movement could not continue to organize a campaign for abortion. Women from the Vancouver Women’s Caucus spoke of the need to organize around the “totality of women’s oppression,” and to assist working class women on picket lines as a strategy. Feminists associated with the founding of the women’s liberation movement, such as Peggy Morton and Marlene Dixon charged those favoring concentration on repeal of the abortion laws with being selfish and instead of demanding things for themselves they should think of other people for a change — the Vietnamese, the poor, the workers, etc. Dixon declared the feminist movement dead, cited the abortion campaign in Canada and the massive August 26 actions in the U.S.A. as “disasters” and said that she wanted to “split the feminist movement along class lines” before she left it. These women opposed any type of action until women had “worked out a rounded analysis of their oppression.” But the supporters of mass action argued that the consciousness of masses of women about their oppression is raised through action.

In spite of red-baiting and radical-sounding appeals a large minority of the conference organized themselves into an abortion workshop and adopted the only concrete action to come out of the conference — a continuation of the abortion campaign with coordinated actions – actions on February 13, 1971.

The February actions represented the continuity of the abortion struggle, and laid the basis for building the large movement that is now organized in Quebec and English Canada. They were successful actions which drew to them many new feminists and gave them a focus around which to organize. They kept the feminist movement visible at a time when a section of it was retreating from any outgoing action. But these actions were limited both by the demand they were organized around and the organizational form of the groups that initiated them.

### **Repeal or free abortion on demand**

They were organized around the demand of “free abortion on demand” and led by multi-issue women’s liberation groups. Only in Toronto was a coalition of all groups and individuals supporting this single demand organized for this action. This met with modest success but it collapsed after Feb. 13 because of disagreement over the slogan of free abortion on demand.

Free abortion on demand was a principled demand expressing the need of women to have complete access to abortion; but it was not an effective demand capable of mobilizing the mass of Canadian women. It is the anti-abortion laws in the federal criminal code that prevent women from obtaining abortions. These laws make obtaining an abortion a risky, expensive, degrading experience for Canadian women. Free abortion on demand, while expressing important principled **concepts**, was not as effective a **demand** to struggle around as repeal of the anti-abortion laws. It was not clear who it is

aimed at — the federal government and its laws or the provincial government and its responsibility for health services, or both at once? It contained too many confusing concepts. In some provinces abortion, if legal, would now be free or very cheap for the majority of women because of the large number of people covered by medicare — was this demand then actually calling for an extension of medicare to full socialized health care? This is an important issue but a diversion from the abortion issue. Many who supported abortion on demand opposed the free side of the demand. Some sectarians in the women's movement, retreating from the abortion struggle, proposed dropping all but the "free" part of the demand and struggling for socialized medicine for all people rather than continuing the feminist struggle.

But it was the demand for repeal of the abortion laws, for removal of abortion from the Criminal Code that had widespread support as reflected in the adoption of this position by professional and church associations, the Association for Repeal of the Abortion Laws, the Humanist Society, the New Democratic Party, the Canadian Labour Congress, the Canadian Medical Association, the Psychiatric Association, and many others.

The task is not to find the most radical-sounding demand — quite a simple matter — but to find the demand most useful to the struggle. The merit of particular demands can only be assessed in the concrete situation, in terms of their capacity to mobilize masses against the capitalist system and its government. The demand that has proved itself most able to mobilize women in struggle is the demand for repeal of the abortion laws because it is clearly posed against the laws which stand in the way of women gaining control of their own bodies. In the summer of 1971 the revolutionists of the LSA/LSO noted that repeal was the most effective mobilizing demand and participated in the founding of coalitions around it.

## **B. The Abortion Campaign**

*In March, 1972, less than half a year after the first few provincial coalitions were formed, the movement took a qualitative leap forward with the formation of the Canadian Women's Coalition to Repeal the Abortion Laws. The Canadian Women's Coalition and the Quebec Front Commun pour l'Abrogation des Lois sur l'Avortement represent the highest expression thus far of women organizing independently for their rights. They have organized a common campaign in English Canada and Quebec, including coordinated cross-country demonstrations on May 6, 1972 and November 20, 1971, a massive petition campaign over an extended period of time, a university referendum campaign, the production of a newspaper, The Spokeswoman, a cross-country tour, and many other ambitious common projects.*

*These two coalitions are concrete proof that women unite in struggle and that they can build a powerful movement when they do so. The abortion law repeal coalitions are teaching feminists how to speak to and draw into struggle the broad masses of women.*

*Polls, campus referendums and the massive response to the petition have testified to the wide dimensions of the sentiment among women for repeal of all abortion laws. The campaign for abortion law repeal is clearly oriented toward the need for independent mass action by women, and has the potential of developing into a mass movement. But the organized campaign is not yet a mass movement in size. The coalitions in Quebec and English Canada still include a relatively narrow range of forces.*

*The difficulties in building the abortion campaign are rooted in the objective problems facing the feminist movement. Not since the suffrage movement have women attempted to launch an independent, coordinated Canada-wide struggle for their rights — and the real history of the suffrage movement is known only to a few women. It is a big step for a woman to move from questioning her role in society, or even from a partial understanding of her oppression, to join an organized campaign against aspects of her oppression, or to participate in a public demonstration of women.*

*What should a woman do to end her oppression? This is a big and difficult question for radicalizing women. Several alternatives are posed to feminists. One alternative widely propagated by the women's magazines, press, etc. is personal liberation — the concept that it is not necessary to change society and its institutions, but rather it is enough to change your own head through discussions, reading, etc. Other non-struggle perspectives are posed, such as the establishment of counter-institutions to the sexist institutions of society, or the integration of more women into the*

*already existing bourgeois institutions so that they can lobby for women's rights.*

*The abortion campaign poses another perspective – a struggle perspective; women organizing independently to eliminate the law which oppresses them. The struggle for the right to abortion necessitates women organizing against the government, independently of bourgeois institutions. It involves taking on the power of many of capitalism's most reactionary institutions, and countering their attempt to mobilize reactionary opinion through a more effective mobilization of women demanding their rights.*

*Many feminists have to be convinced of the need for a struggle perspective – as opposed to liberal, reformist and ultraleftist strategies – before they will join the campaign. This poses the need to educate many women on the importance of the **struggle** for abortion, rather than just on the importance of the issue itself.*

*The abortion campaign is a feminist campaign, because it organizes women independently in struggle against their oppression. At the same time the abortion coalitions don't demand that women be conscious feminists before they become involved in the campaign. They unite all those women who agree with the demand for repeal of abortion laws – a clear demand for a basic democratic right for women.*

*We support the slogan, "Abortion: A Woman's Right to Choose", as the central theme of the campaign, in order to give a clear and feminist motivation to the repeal demand. This slogan explains repeal of the abortion laws in the most popular way: as a simple democratic right, and clearly the right of all women. It clarifies that the abortion issue centers around whether or not women will continue to be deprived of this right. This slogan directs its appeal at all layers of women, because it says that women themselves should be able to choose if and when to bear children. Since feminists are fighting for the right to choose over all aspects of their lives, this slogan also expresses succinctly how the abortion struggle links up with the broad struggle for liberation of women.*

*The slogan "Every Mother a Willing Mother; Every Child a Wanted Child" should not be put forward as one of the slogans of the abortion campaign. Unlike "Abortion, a Woman's Right to Choose", it does not pose the right of women to abortion. Experience with this slogan has shown it to lead to a diversion in our debate with the "right-to-lifers" rather than a clarification of the key question. It tends to lead into discussions of the situation of children, and whether abortion is a means to ensure that children will be more "wanted" and happier. We must point out how the "right-to-lifers" ignore the rights of the living; we must center our polemic on their contempt for the rights of women. (This is a case of an actual repudiation of a specific adopted slogan of the first, July 1972 draft resolution, a slogan which was championed by Ross Dowson and his tendency – under ultraleft pressures on the women's fraction within the LSA –ed.)*

*Further, it poses the question within the framework of the traditional role allotted women – that of mothers. One of the powerful challenges of the feminist movement is to the concept that motherhood is the destiny of all women. This demands posing the question of abortion in terms of the rights of women, rather than within the framework of the mother-child relationship.*

*The abortion campaign has the potential of drawing in masses of women, women of every social class and social origin, since all women are denied control of their bodies. Unlike sectarians, we don't write off any group of women as being beyond the reach of this feminist campaign. But we recognize the unevenness of the radicalization of women. Some layers, in particular student women, are radicalizing faster than others. With this in mind we see the areas where the radicalization of women is the deepest as being the priority areas of building the abortion campaign. The two most promising areas at this time are student women, and women in the New Democratic Party.*

*The abortion campaign is built through its ongoing activities and its mobilizations. The abortion struggle includes many types of activities: rallies, speakouts, debates, demonstrations, petitioning, etc. All these activities complement each other. The petition is one of the tools to build the campaign and has proven particularly useful in pulling in other organizations and in giving new women a concrete activity. It is useful in drawing in activists into the campaign when used on campus abortion literature tables, etc. But it should not replace other aspects of the campaign. Its main usefulness is in building the campaign, rather than merely in showing that a large number of people support repeal. The goals of the different stages of the petition campaign should be examined in this light and should be set at a realistic*

level.

*As revolutionary socialists, with the task of attempting to lead the feminist movement into effective anti-capitalist struggle, we see the building of broad coalitions around specific issues, like abortion, and the mobilization of broad layers of women into action independent of and against the ruling class, as our central task. Other aspects of the feminist movement, in which we participate – consciousness raising groups, women's centers, women's studies groups, women's groups in the NDP, trade unions, the National Action Committee on the Status of Women, feminist groups in the high schools and campuses, etc. – are all complementary to the central task of building the mass action coalitions. We participate in these different formations with the aim of winning women to a mass action strategy for women's liberation. We do this through the actions and program we advocate, and by making direct links between these groups and the abortion coalitions. We also participate with the aim of educating women about the source of their oppression and the socialist solution. \_*

## **E**

One of the most important areas of feminist organization for the building of a mass feminist movement is the campuses and high schools.

Student women, because of the depth of the youth radicalization and the fact that many of them have already participated in mass actions in the student movement, and because of the special oppression of young women, provide the backbone for the mass action wing of the feminist movement. The schools too provide unique opportunities for organizing both discussion and action against women's oppression. Thus campus-based feminist groups are least likely to become inward turned and oriented solely to personal liberation, counter-institutionalism, reformism, etc. Student women have already become some of the main activists in the coalitions. They will continue to play an even greater role in building the mass actions and in educating women as to the necessity of independent action of women.

Another area of feminist organization, the cross-city feminist groups, has not proved to be viable vehicles for mass action. Before the formation of the abortion coalitions, some of these groups played an important role in keeping the feminist movement visible and in the launching of coalitions, but they have since declined. Lacking the clear focus of the single issue coalitions, or the stable operational area of the campus feminist groups, these city-wide feminist groups have shown a distinct tendency to become inward-grown and prone to living room feminism, seeing the movement as an end in itself, a place where individual women can be liberated.

## **Mass Action and the NDP**

A revolutionary strategy for the feminist movement must recognize the New Democratic Party, the political expression of the organized working class in English Canada, as an important ally for the feminist struggle. All the other political parties, the Liberals, Conservatives and Social Credit, are the political instruments of the big corporations. They represent the tiny minority which owns the wealth of this country and exploits the majority of men and women for profit. These parties represent the oppressors of women and act on their behalf.

The NDP, on the other hand, is based on the trade unions – its roots are in the working class. The NDP, even if in a distorted way, gives voice to the growing anti-imperialist, feminist and socialist movements. Feminists and left wingers have succeeded in getting the party to adopt a number of planks in a women's rights program. The most important of these is the demand for repeal of the anti-abortion laws which is the official position of the federal party. The NDP, particularly through the persistent work of Grace MacInnis, MP, has become the party most identified with the abortion law repeal struggle. But the NDP is a long way from being actively involved in the struggle for women's liberation. The reformist leadership of the party, which believes that capitalism only needs to be patched up and thus fears the revolutionary dynamic of independent mass action, has attempted to block the impact of feminism on the party.

Some feminists, seeing the opposition to their struggle by the NDP's leadership, have dismissed the NDP as just another

of the parties which represent the interests of male supremacy. Some of these women have been drawn into a group called "Women for Political Action" which is running independent candidates against the Liberals and Tories and the NDP in the elections. Some say all women who in the elections regardless of the party they represent should be supported. Others, such as Laura Sabia of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women, argue that women should infiltrate the "parties with power," the Liberal and Tory bourgeois parties to form women's caucuses in these parties to pressure them to act on behalf of women.

Far from advancing the independent feminist struggle, all these positions subordinate it to the task of pressuring the ruling class parties. Women who appear as candidates of the Liberals, Tories and Social Credit parties in reality only serve as decoys to divert and deaden the women's struggle. It is suicidal for women to try to work through the political instruments destined to uphold the system that oppresses them. Women must ally with those forces which have no stake in the present system and every interest in overthrowing it, with the working class whose mass political party in English Canada is the NDP. Due to its failure to identify with the independentist thrust of the Quebec struggle the NDP has not projected the concept of independent political action and itself as a serious force in Quebec. It would appear for the whole next period at least to be eclipsed by the diversionary bourgeois reformist Parti Québécois. The concept of an independent and socialist Quebec is sustained only by the as yet small but vigorous Trotskyist Ligue Socialiste Ouvrière in such popular actions as its 1970 Montreal mayoralty campaign behind (Ms.) Manon Léger.

Feminists must fight to block any and every attempt to channel their struggle off into the morass of bourgeois politics. In Quebec they should identify themselves with every action that would promote independent labor politics. In Quebec they should identify themselves with every action that would promote independent labor politics. In English Canada they must support and invigorate the NDP's identification with women's rights. This fight brings women in direct conflict with the reformist leadership of the party and trade union hierarchy and the reformist illusions of the class as a whole. The feminist struggle will play an important role in breaking the Canadian working class from reformism.

Many of the forces that will make the NDP act for women will come from those women currently within the party. Women in the NDP, as elsewhere learn about the nature of the system, and the futility of reformism largely through struggling against their own oppression for their own needs. It is quite possible and even probable that many of the traditionally conservative women's groups in the party will take on a feminist character. An example of this already exists: at the last convention of the BC NDP the women's committee, which had been largely devoted to serving coffee at functions, changed its name and its character to a Women's Rights Committee. It has formulated policy on women's rights, supported the abortion coalition and even held an all-women's conference to which it invited representatives of the feminist movement. This shows the possibilities for organizing women in the NDP. It would be sectarian to demand, as some women in the Waffle (*the large left nationalist wing of the NDP at the time —ed.*) do, that the NDP women must first develop a full feminist or socialist consciousness before they are drawn into struggle around their rights. The continued building of a mass movement of women organized independently for their needs is the primary vehicle through which feminists can pressure the NDP to become actively involved in the struggle. Particularly through the abortion repeal struggle, feminists can intervene in the NDP and push it into action. The active participation of the NDP in the abortion coalition would open the door to thousands of women, particularly working class women, to becoming active in the feminist struggle. It would also undercut the leadership's attempt to make the party purely an electoral machine.

## Opponents of Mass Action

The biggest challenge to the perspective of building a mass, action-oriented women's liberation movement comes from, on the one hand, the fear that the status quo is so entrenched, and the opposition so scattered, that no serious change is possible; and on the other hand, the illusion that the capitalist system can and ultimately will be adjusted to meet the needs of the majority. These are the traditional concepts that maintain capitalist domination at this conjuncture. The majority of Canadians accepts these myths, and reformist and liberal forces foster them within their ranks.

These concepts in the women's movement are most clearly represented by the leadership of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women, and the more radical sounding Women for Political Action. Reformism in the women's movement is based on the belief that it is possible to win liberation under capitalism, and logically leads to reliance on those responsible for perpetuating this system, to grant women their liberation. Such reformists **counterpose** government committees, women's candidates and support of bourgeois parties, lobbying, etc., to mass action organized

by the independent women's liberation movement.

All the reformists, both bourgeois and of the left, have exhibited hostility inwards the feminist movement. The NDP leadership represents the biggest reformist current within the English Canadian working class. They firmly oppose independent mass action of women and fear the radicalization of women coming into the party. But they are susceptible to pressure from the radicalization and have to adapt to it in order to maintain their base.

The Communist Party (*Stalinist*) has shown open hostility to feminism. In their press they have said the "real women's struggle is that of men and women fighting side by side, and they have glorified the family, the main institution for the oppression of women under capitalism. The Communist Party's hostile attitude toward feminism flows from their long-standing support for the Soviet bureaucracy's policy of peaceful coexistence with capitalism. The CP therefore sees its task as building support in all classes for the Kremlin bureaucracy – not as struggling to defeat Canadian capitalism to win socialism. Thus they pose a reformist perspective for all Canadian mass movements. In addition, their hostility to the independent feminist movement flows from their craven apologetics for the Soviet bureaucracy's petty bourgeois prejudices and anti-women policies in defense of the family etc. inside the Soviet Union itself. It doesn't take a feminist very long to figure out that the position of women in Stalinized Soviet society is not what feminists are fighting for.

The ultralefts and sectarians agree with the reformists in their opposition to mass action of women. For instance, the sectarian Canadian Party of Labor (*Maoist –ed.*) rejects the feminist movement on the grounds that the only valid women's struggles are those which are waged by women workers around narrowly conceived job issues.

While smaller by far than the reformist currents, the ultralefts represent some of the noisiest and most intransigent opponents of mass action. Many of them came out of the "New Left" (*student-youth current of the 60s –ed.*) and played a big role in the first feminist groups. Ultralefts and sectarians throughout the history of the feminist movement in Canada have rejected struggles around the basic demands of the movement on the basis that these demands are not "radical" enough. They lack confidence in the ability of women to learn in struggle and don't understand how the revolution they ceaselessly proclaim will actually be brought about. Because they don't see the revolutionary dynamic of struggles around concrete issues such as abortion they have no program which can mobilize masses of women who do not yet see the capitalist system as their enemy. Ultralefts and sectarians often also reflect reformist illusions about the system's ability to meet the needs of women. Neither ultralefts nor reformists see the dynamic relationship between struggles for immediate gains around issues such as abortion that directly affect women and the attainment of full women's liberation. Thus they ignore the most important task of women's liberation: the creation of a powerful mass independent woman's movement.

Other ultralefts and reformists who also line up in the category of opponents of mass action are the utopian idealists. This current wants to make the movement a substitute for the inability of capitalist society to create an un-alienated personal life. They have a counter institutional strategy. Among these idealists are women who set up communes and collectives as an "alternative" to the family; others who pose movement-run day care and abortion referral services as an end in themselves, a way in which women can become free. Many of these idealists could be called "living room feminists". They orient to making women's centres into areas where small groups can meet together in pure sisterhood. They see consciousness raising as the **chief** method of changing society because they believe that oppression originates in people's heads rather than being instilled by social institutions. Their orientation can only mislead and demoralize women since it is impossible to forge the new socialist human race without overcoming the totality of humanity's degenerating existence within capitalist society — that is, without first carrying through the revolution itself, thereby laying down the material conditions necessary to the flourishing of a socialist humanity.

The most powerful and vicious opposition to the mass action perspective for the feminist movement has centered in on the abortion repeal movement, the biggest mass campaign of the feminist movement in Canada and around the world. While the right wing opponents of abortion repeal appeal to the most blatantly anti-woman sentiments and accuse feminists of being "murderers", those forces within the women's movement and the left who oppose or abstain from the building of a mass movement for the right to abortion justify themselves with other arguments. Some of these are:

- 1) The abortion issue doesn't affect working class women.
- 2) We shouldn't concentrate on abortion, but rather look to the reasons why women seek abortions in the first place and tackle them – e.g., poverty, lack of child care, lack of housing, etc.



- 3) Abortion law repeal is a reformist demand that will easily be co-opted by the ruling class.
- 4) It is a single issue; if we concentrate on it the movement will die when it is won.
- 5) The issue is important but we shouldn't devote so much energy to it.
- 6) The abortion coalitions are the wrong form to organize the issue. They are bourgeois because they include women from all class backgrounds, political points of view etc.
- 7) Abortion repeal is a "trotskyist" issue.

All of these points show a lack of understanding of both the nature of the oppression of women and the way in which women's liberation will be brought about.

*1) The abortion issue doesn't affect working class women.* This argument and its variants – abortion doesn't affect les Québécoises, or native women, etc.—denies the simple facts of the matter. Not only do working class women get pregnant the same way as other women, but they are hardest hit by the denial of abortion. They are most sharply affected by lack of choices in their lives. They are the prime targets the hypocritical morality of capitalism, which uses sexual guilt to drive people into marriage. They have the least money and connections to break through the red tape of therapeutic abortion boards, and the greatest difficulty raising the large sums of money needed to travel to the U.S. or other countries to get legal abortions. It is not bourgeois women but working class women who are the chief victims of back-room butcher abortions.

All this is even more true of women of oppressed minorities. French speaking Québécoises are hit even harder by the abortion laws than their English speaking sisters. Most Quebec hospitals, controlled by the Catholic Church, refuse to set up abortion committees and thus do no therapeutic abortions at all. The English hospitals in Quebec that have boards have long waiting lists of women wanting abortions. This situation was dramatically revealed when the Ontario Supreme Court passed an injunction halting the legal abortion of a woman resident in Quebec, the first abortion injunction in Canada. She had gone to Ottawa to get a therapeutic abortion because he could not get one in Quebec. She was unilingual French. Since her husband lied to her, and the court order was served in English so that she couldn't read it, it was not until after the injunction was passed that she discovered she could have fought it and proceeded to launch an appeal.

Native women have little chance of getting legal abortions in Canada. The racist attitude of doctors and hospital boards is that "maybe the experience will teach them a lesson." Native women are also the prime target of forced sterilizations. Often they are allowed abortions only if they agree to sterilization.

*2) We should look to the underlying reasons why women seek abortions in the first place, etc.* This argument implies that if women had adequate food, clothing, housing, etc. then they would be satisfied with state enforced motherhood, to live at the mercy of their biology! But lack of control of her body is fundamental to upholding the other aspects of a woman's oppression. That is why women are first struggling for control of their bodies as the essential step towards gaining control of their lives. Women are not just after a little life, but rather full control of their lives, full liberation. They're demanding the right to full lives, including the right to sex without punishment.

The present laws deny women control of their bodies. They prevent women from being able to decide for themselves when and if to have children. Women must have this right. No one else, no doctor, husband, prime minister or judge, should have the power to rule whether a woman's reasons for wanting an abortion are "good enough" or not.

*3) Abortion law repeal is a reformist demand, easily co-opted.* This contains two fundamental misunderstandings — the first is the concept that the ruling class will grant this demand without a major fight. Apart from its denial of reality, this position ignores the centrality of lack of control over women's own bodies to their oppression and the importance of the maintenance of the myth of the natural inferiority of women as a cornerstone of bourgeois ideology. Secondly, this argument comes from the misconception that the only really revolutionary demand is one that is foolproof – that cannot be met in any way by the ruling class. If this were true, the only demand that could be raised would be "socialism now," which would hardly mobilize masses in struggle. But in fact demands which really aid the revolution are those which mobilize women around actual needs they feel, into mass action against the source of their oppression. Some of these demands will be won – giving confidence to women and impetus to the struggle. It is not a demand, or even a series of demands which threatens the continued rule of the capitalist class – it is the mobilization of masses in action for these

demands. In this struggle women learn the real nature of their oppression, gain confidence through their victories to struggle further against it, and learn that their full liberation can only come by transforming the whole of society.

Revolutionaries do not differ from those who aim simply to reform the present system by opposing reforms. They differ in that they raise demands which genuinely meet real needs and that focus the struggle against the source of the problem. They differ in that they are prepared to lead the struggle through to the end and by any means necessary, particularly when it means passing beyond the borders of capitalism in a social revolution, to win them.

4) *Abortion is a single issue, etc.* The fact that abortion is a single issue is its strong point. Women can unite around the struggle for abortion law repeal in spite of different backgrounds and views on other questions. Victories around this question will not kill the movement, but rather spur the movement on to struggle for other gains. This fact is understood well by the opponents of women's liberation who are mobilizing forces to block women from winning this one basic right. This point underestimates women whose consciousnesses have been raised in mass action for repeal, and who will tackle other issues with a new confidence based on their experience in this first big battle. It also sees the abortion issue as being formally divided off from other aspects of the oppression of women. But in fact, this issue is so fundamental that it is like a Pandora-box; once women reject the concept that their biology must be their destiny, all the other myths that uphold their oppression are brought into question.

5) *Abortion law repeal is important but we shouldn't devote so much time to it. **B** This position fails to grasp both the significance of the abortion struggle as the first cross-Canada struggle of women for a right of women since the suffrage struggle, and the fact that the abortion struggle is not in competition with other struggles of women. Women will struggle around many questions and revolutionaries support all actions of women for their rights. We see our priority of intervening with our limited forces as being the abortion movement, because of its strategic importance at this time: it clearly poses a mass action perspective. It is in the forefront of the feminist movement at this time.*

*This position actually represents a concession to all the pressure from the ruling class and its spokesmen, media, etc. to play down the abortion issue, to dump it. In face of this tremendous daily pressure, exerted **because** the struggle is so revolutionary in its implications, feminists must stand firm and not retreat. Feminists must meet the challenge to respond to this vanguard issue, and educate others as to the central importance of the abortion struggle.*

*Revolutionaries are challenged to educate others as to the importance of the abortion struggle. We also intervene in other struggles as they develop, and in the many discussions around the oppression of women, etc., determining the scope and character of our intervention according to the conditions in each situation. **E***

6) *The abortion coalitions are the wrong organization form because they include women from all class backgrounds, etc.* This view springs from an incorrect analysis of women's oppression, from a belief that it is really only economic in character and that only working class women are oppressed. It fails to come to grips with the role the family plays as the central institution of women's oppression. Through it, not just women who work, **but all women** are oppressed. From birth women are conditioned to accept their limited role as childbearer and child-rearer. They are conditioned to accept the theoretical justification for this role, the myth of their "natural" inferiority.

The explosive potential of the feminist movement lies in its ability to reach out to all women, regardless of class, race, etc. and unite them in struggle. The abortion coalitions are the concrete realization of some of this potential. The broader they become the more diverse forces they include, the more powerful the movement becomes precisely because it is mobilized around a clear opposition to a key aspect of women's oppression and against the state.

7) *Abortion repeal is a Trotskyist issue.* This is pure red-baiting, the last attack of people who can't answer an opponent's position politically. Revolutionists don't **create** or **own** issues or movements; we intervene in objective processes to give leadership. Trotskyists of the LSA/LSO have recognized the importance of and intervened in the abortion struggle since its inception. By calling the whole abortion repeal movement "Trotskyite," some opponents of mass action mimic the bourgeoisie's smear techniques used to prejudice people against listening to a position or supporting a struggle. Red-baiting and the exclusionism that flows from it has been an ongoing problem in the feminist movement. Feminists must not tolerate it as it represents a real danger to their struggle.

## Our tasks

Women in the LSA/LSO have actively participated in the new feminist movement since its inception. We have greeted each new manifestation of the deep-going questioning of women's traditional role and aided in the building of the organized movement. We have participated in the consciousness raising discussions and debates which are taking place wherever women get together. We have participated in actions around many of the aspects of women's oppression – for equal pay, against the objectification of women as sex objects, against discrimination against women in the schools and on the job, for women's studies courses, for high school women's rights, for the freeing of women political prisoners, for access to Quebec pubs and other public places, for child care, for abortion law repeal, etc. We want to continue to participate in all the various aspects of developing movements.

In the course of these experiences it has become clear that at this time the abortion issue is the struggle that is attracting the most support from women and that it is a key struggle for the building of a mass feminist movement. The Canadian Women's Coalition to Repeal the Abortion Laws and the Front Commun pour l'abrogation des lois sur l'Avortement are speaking to thousands of women through their activities. The importance of revolutionaries of the LSA/LSO participating in the leadership of this campaign is pointed up all the more sharply by the opposition to feminist mass action expressed by all the other left tendencies in Canada.

Not only do members of the LSA/LSO have an important contribution to make to the movement with our understanding of capitalism and women's oppression, but the experience of participating in the building of mass movement, of learning how to propagandize to the broad masses of women and to mobilize them into action is a crucial experience for revolutionists. Our most important task in the period ahead will be to educate women about the central importance of the abortion struggle and to build the abortion repeal campaign through the abortion coalitions and student feminist groups, work in the NDP, etc.

The new feminism is characterized by a widespread questioning of all aspects of women's oppression and all questions which touch on it. Women in all sectors of society are searching for answers to questions about their past, present and future. Marxism, the theory of the revolutionary socialists of the LSP/LSO, holds the answers to these questions. **Revolutionary socialists** have a unique contribution to make to the feminist movement with our analysis of the roots of the oppression of women and our revolutionary strategy for women's liberation.

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